United Nations S/2010/86*

Security Council

Distr.: General
16 February 2010
English
Original: French

Letter dated 12 February 2010 from the Secretary-General to the President of the Security Council

I refer to my letter of 6 August 2009 (S/2009/407) addressed to the Security Council, in which I recommended that the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) should be renewed and noted that, three years after the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), it is timely to take stock of the operational capacity of UNIFIL and conduct a comprehensive review, which would include a comprehensive evaluation of the Maritime Task Force. The Security Council, in its resolution 1884 (2009) of 27 August 2009, renewed the mandate of UNIFIL for an additional year, noted that the review would be conducted "during the coming months" and welcomed "receiving as soon as possible the conclusions of the review of the operational capacity of UNIFIL".

In accordance with my proposal, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNIFIL undertook to assess the operational effectiveness of UNIFIL, including its force structure, assets and requirements, on land and at sea. The joint technical review of the Department and UNIFIL has now been completed. It is forward-looking, with the aim of ensuring that the mission's assets and resources are configured most appropriately to fulfil its mandated tasks. It is not a review of the mandate, authorized strength or rules of engagement of UNIFIL.

The review should also be seen in the light of the Security Council's presidential statement of 5 August 2009 (S/PRST/2009/24), in which the Council stressed the need for regular assessment of the strength, mandate and composition of peacekeeping operations, with a view to making the necessary adjustments where appropriate, according to progress achieved or changing circumstances on the ground.

In September 2009, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNIFIL initiated a two-stage review process. UNIFIL proceeded to analyse the current situation in its area of operations, taking into account its mandated tasks and the experience it had gained since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). It then determined appropriate forward-looking adjustments to the Force structure as necessary in an effort to adapt the operational capacity of UNIFIL to changes in the operational environment that have occurred since late 2006. In mid-November 2009, UNIFIL submitted its initial findings and preliminary recommendations to the Department.

* Reissued for technical reasons on 1 March 2010.

10-24147* (E) 010310

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In parallel, the Department held meetings at United Nations Headquarters with countries contributing troops to UNIFIL (and to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) and briefed Security Council members at the expert level (political and military) on the review process and on the initial findings of UNIFIL. The Governments of Israel and Lebanon were kept informed of the review process. UNIFIL also held preliminary meetings with troop-contributing countries and Ambassadors of the permanent members of the Security Council in Beirut, as well as separate meetings with the Lebanese Armed Forces and with the Israel Defense Forces.

During the second stage of the review process, a United Nations Headquarters mission visited UNIFIL from 6 to 12 December 2009 for a joint assessment of the initial review findings of UNIFIL. The review conclusions were jointly finalized in January 2010 by United Nations Headquarters and the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Claudio Graziano.

Troop-contributing countries and Council members have been briefed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on the outcome of the joint technical review of the Department and UNIFIL. The review findings do not call for radical changes to the Force, or the wider mission, and they do not significantly alter the overall number of required military and civilian personnel. The review has, nevertheless, reached a number of key conclusions which would have an impact on the structure and configuration of the Force, coordination within the mission, and relations with the parties, particularly the Lebanese Armed Forces.

The review recognizes that since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), there has been considerable progress in the implementation of the mandated tasks of UNIFIL. This progress would not have been possible without significant deployment of troops and maritime assets, involving substantial resources, and based on the strong commitment of the Council and troop-contributing countries. The mission's robust mandate and capabilities on the ground continue to play an important role in maintaining stability in southern Lebanon.

The review reaffirms the essential nature of the liaison and coordination function of UNIFIL, in particular the key role played by the tripartite mechanism. In this regard, the review recommends that UNIFIL liaison and coordination capabilities be strengthened to reinforce its work with the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces, and focus on long-term confidence-building projects. Additional liaison is also needed to assist the implementation of arrangements agreed within the tripartite mechanism regarding Blue Line confidence-building measures. The establishment of an office in Tel Aviv, as agreed by the Government of Israel in February 2007, also remains of critical importance for UNIFIL.

The review proposes certain adjustments to the force structure, assets and requirements of UNIFIL that are intended to strengthen its operational capacity and effectiveness within its area of operations. The intention is to create a more task-oriented and mobile posture for the Force, including through the provision of a Force reserve, which would be able to operate throughout the UNIFIL area of operations. Recommendations are also put forward to improve UNIFIL capacity in information operations, technical investigations and other specialized staff skills.

The review's recommendations reflect the increasing significance of UNIFIL activities along the Blue Line, highlighting the importance of accelerating the visible marking of the Blue Line and completing the project for a technical road running parallel to the Blue Line through the establishment of a Blue Line task force. This task force would enhance the operational effectiveness of UNIFIL and also serve to build confidence.

The Lebanese Armed Forces remain the key partner of UNIFIL. The review highlights the need for the formalization of a regular strategic dialogue mechanism between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces to carry out analyses of ground forces and maritime assets, and set a series of benchmarks reflecting the correlation between the capacities and responsibilities of UNIFIL and the capacities and responsibilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces, as well as take into account the security situation in the area. This mechanism would help the Lebanese Armed Forces to establish their needs and required operational capabilities for implementing the tasks mandated in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), including securing its maritime borders, and facilitate the gradual assumption of security responsibility in the UNIFIL area of operations and the Lebanese territorial waters by the Lebanese Armed Forces.

The review entailed a comprehensive evaluation of the Maritime Task Force of UNIFIL. At the request of the Government of Lebanon, the Maritime Task Force is mandated to carry out a crucial dual role — to help the Lebanese navy to prevent the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon by carrying out maritime interdiction operations, and to provide training for Lebanon's naval personnel.

The review concludes that the Maritime Task Force remains an essential element of UNIFIL and therefore recommends regular assessment of the relation between maritime resources and the tasks to be accomplished, which would be done by establishing a series of benchmarks reflecting the correlation between the capacities and responsibilities of the Maritime Task Force and the capacities and responsibilities of the Lebanese navy.

I wish to emphasize that the current deployment, assets and resources of UNIFIL cannot be sustained indefinitely. It is the responsibility of the parties to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the presence of UNIFIL, which has provided a strong deterrent to the resumption of hostilities and has laid the foundation for building a process that can achieve a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). Lack of progress in that process threatens to unravel the cessation of hostilities.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon